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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MW](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM: CAMPAIGN
BEGINS, QUIETLY

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

Ref: Belgrade 322

11. (SBU) Summary: With the rules/law, date, and question adopted last week (reftel), the campaign proper for independence or union began. Solana met with MN PM Djukanovic and SaM President Marovic this week. Both blocs are reaching out beyond their core supporters -- the independence bloc to the diaspora, and the pro-Union bloc to the Radicals (SRS). Planning for international observation of the referendum has begun. End summary.

PM Djukanovic Meets EU HR Solana

12. (U) PM Milo Djukanovic met with EU High Representative Javier Solana in Brussels on March 8. Following the meeting, Djukanovic stated that he was "completely certain" that independence would win, and would be supported more than 55 percent of the turnout. He also stated however that "besides being convinced of victory in the referendum, he was also thinking, as a serious and responsible politician" about the consequences if the result was in the so-called "grey zone" (between 50 and 55 percent). When Solana was asked about the "grey zone," he said that the Referendum Law was completely clear. Solana's envoy Ambassador Miroslav Lajcak participated in the meeting.

SaM President Marovic Meets EU HR Solana

13. (U) As part of an official visit to Belgium, SaM President Svetozar Marovic also met with Solana on March 9. Marovic is a member of Djukanovic's DPS, and has stated that while he publicly supports the DPS's call for an independent Montenegro, he will continue as SaM President through the referendum.

... and This Week, The Opposition Meets Solana

14. (U) Predrag Bulatovic, head of the opposition Socialist People's Party (SNP) and of the pro-Union bloc, will meet with Solana on March 14.

Reaching Out to: The Diaspora

15. (U) Branko Lukovac, leader of the Independence Movement, noted publicly that perhaps 130,000 Montenegrins live in western Europe. He said another 10 to 20 thousand Montenegrins, many from the dominantly pro-Independence

region of Plav (SE Montenegro), live in the U.S. (Note: The 2003 census showed only 13,800 persons in the Plav region, an area that has experienced heavy emigration.) Lukovac said that many of these Montenegrins have maintained their legal residence in Montenegro and therefore retain their voting rights. The minor opposition party, Democratic Serb Party (DSS), countered that the last official count showed only some 52,511 registered voters living outside of Montenegro. The last official voters' registration list has just over 466,000 names. (Comment: The Montenegrins "disenfranchised" in Serbia by the Montenegrin electoral law have not maintained their legal residence in Montenegro. End comment.)

Reaching Out to: The Radicals (SRS)

¶16. (U) Local media reported that the pro-Union Coalition leader, Predrag Bulatovic, "expects" the Montenegro wing of the Radical party to join the pro-State Union coalition in the referendum campaign. Bulatovic said the involvement of any political forces from Serbia is not necessary, but that he would support "that the voice of our Serbian colleagues is also heard."

¶17. (SBU) Meeting with A/PO on March 6, Bulatovic's deputy Srda Bozovic said that members of the Radical party in Montenegro, "as individuals", could support the pro-Union coalition. He stated that Radicals would have no public role in the coalition, e.g., would not speak at rallies. He noted that as the Radicals have a potentially crucial "five or ten thousand votes" in Montenegro, the pro-Union bloc would not however shut them out. Bozovic nevertheless had particularly harsh words for SRS leader Nikolic.

Media to Adopt Code of Conduct for Referendum

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¶18. (U) The Montenegrin Union of Independent Broadcasting Media (UNEM) announced March 6 that that it will organize a round table for March 10, when a code of conduct regulating the behavior of the Montenegrin media during the referendum will be signed. UNEM announced that Serbian media accessible on the territory of Montenegro will also be invited to sign the document next week. The presidents of the two Serbian journalist associations stated that Serbian media should sign and observe the code.

Blocs Debate on Serbian TV

¶19. (U) Pro-Independence Montenegrin Parliament Speaker Ranko Krivokapic (SDP) and leader of pro-Union bloc Predrag Bulatovic (SNP) debated Montenegrin independence on Serbian Public Television (RTS) on March 7. Krivokapic was confident that independence would be supported by more than 55 percent of votes cast. He rejected stories that authorities will declare independence even if pro-independence votes are less than 55 percent. Bulatovic stated that the real purpose behind independence was just to gain immunity for PM Djukanovic, whom he said was under investigation by the Italian and German courts (for tobacco smuggling during UN sanctions). RTS was noticeably fair and balanced in its moderation of the debate.

International Observation Begins

10.(U) OSCE/ODHIR's preliminary assessment team arrived in Montenegro March 8. International and local organizations and NGOs, as well as representatives of foreign countries, are permitted by Montenegrin law to observe the campaign and the referendum vote itself. OSCE/ODHIR will likely issue its first preliminary report after the vote as soon

as noon local time the following day, Monday May 22. The final report may take up to a month, but would not contradict the preliminary report of results.

¶12. (SBU) USAID will provide USD 60,000 to its local implementer, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), to support local monitoring. NDI has been in Montenegro since 1999, working with USAID. NDI's local partner is the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT). CDT has an excellent track record in monitoring prior campaigns and votes in Montenegro.

¶13. (SBU) The Consulate has begun planning for the U.S. contribution to the monitoring effort on the day of the referendum. Tentatively, a dozen teams will be deployed throughout Montenegro, with dual accreditation from the USG and OSCE. Over 1100 polling stations will open at 8 a.m. May 21, closing 12 hours later.

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